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City socked with suits over lead poisoning

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OAKLAND — Two \$10 million claims were filed against the city of Oakland Monday on behalf of a 5-year-old boy whose blood allegedly became contaminated with lead from Verdesse Carter Park, site of a former battery factory.

The claims also allege that Tyree Hall has suffered emotional distress and many bad symptoms, including vomiting, nosebleeds, learning disabilities, fear of developing cancer and other health problems.

One claim was filed on behalf of Tyree, the other on behalf of his mother, Sheila Hall. The city attorney handling Carter Park could not be reached for comment.

The Halls used to live across the street from the three-acre Elmhurst district park, a thriving battery factory until 1974. Neighbors long have suspected toxic contaminants remained after the lot was paved over and planted with grass. The park has been shut down many times to clean out contaminated soil or rock.

But several of the tidy yards surrounding the park are contaminated with extremely high levels of lead, and nothing has been done to clean them up, federal officials have reported.

Sheila Hall said Wednesday that two years ago her son started having nosebleeds and frequently threw up "like he had cancer." Doctor have not been able to drop his blood-lead level below 14.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta has established 10 as the blood-lead level of concern.

Michael Cohen, the Halls' Oakland attorney, said the city has 45 days to respond to the claims. After that a formal lawsuit can be filed. He said \$10 million did not seem excessive when compared to the Halls' suffering.

"It's such an outrageous sort of thing to do on the face of it ... to put a park where there used to be a battery factory," he said. "For a child to come in to the world and be contaminated to the point of having serious illness, or brain damage, it's hard to imagine anything worse."

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